

VZCZCXRO5976

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R 050806Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1495
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4261
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2073
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1938
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2509
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2855
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, EUR/ACE, DRL
AID/W FOR EE/EA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: TURKEMINSTAN: DAS KROL MEETS WITH MEJLIS SPEAKER
NURBERDIYEVA

REF: ASHGABAT 0754

1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

2. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a September 3 meeting with visiting Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for South Central Asia (SCA) George Krol, Mejlis (Parliament) Speaker Akja Nurberdiyeva repeatedly lauded President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov's contributions to Turkmenistan's political, economic and educational development. The discussion addressed the expected changes following the ratification of a new constitution, the role of parliamentarians, the upcoming December 2008 parliamentary elections, and the status of possible new laws on religion and media. Nurberdiyeva highlighted the accessibility of deputies and the Parliament's willingness to consider new ideas from international organizations, but stressed that many of them cannot be transferred from one culture to another. Turkmenistan would accept only those inputs that conformed to its unique cultural specifics. END SUMMARY.

PRAISE FOR PRESIDENTIAL REFORMS IN ALL AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT

3. (SBU) During a September 3 meeting with visiting DAS/SCA George Krol, Mejlis (Parliament) Speaker Akja Nurberdiyeva repeatedly highlighted President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov's support for Turkmenistan's political, social, and economic development. Nurberdiyeva explained the interagency process used when drafting new legislation. She acknowledged that, aside from commentary submitted by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), no international organizations participated in the drafting of the new constitution. (COMMENT: Embassies and international organizations in Ashgabat provided comments to the draft constitution through the UN. END COMMENT.) Later, the Speaker said the Halk Maslahaty (People's Council) will be disbanded after ratification of the new constitution, leaving Turkmenistan with three branches of government, as in many other countries.

4. (SBU) The Speaker explained that Parliamentary deputies were very accessible to their constituents. Deputies' activities were publicized on television, and they met with constituents in their districts. The people must know that deputies' doors are always open. Following upcoming elections in December, parliament will be

increased in size from sixty-five deputies to one hundred twenty-five. New deputies will represent districts of equal size.

ADAPTING TO COUNTRY'S SPECIFICS KEY TO COOPERATION

¶15. (SBU) The Speaker said that each country had its unique characteristics, and Turkmenistan will resolve its specific challenges by adapting foreign ideas when appropriate. One country's culture cannot be transferred directly onto another. In Turkmenistan, family was very important. Respect for elders and care for youth were core values.

¶16. (SBU) Nurberdiyeva did not understand those that come to her to talk about gender issues. Turkmenistan did not have problems with gender issues. Women did not cover their faces. Men and women were already equal. The new constitution refers to both "women and men" as equal, and that they should receive equal pay for equal work. To highlight this, President Berdimuhamedov provided a gift to all women on March 8, International Women's Day.

LAWS ON RELIGION AND MEDIA NOT COMPLETED

¶17. (SBU) In response to DAS Krol's question about the status of a new law on religion, Nurberdiyeva replied that parliament had not taken up this draft yet since it was currently occupied with preparations for the elections. Two religions (Islam and Russian Orthodox) have always been accepted without problems in Turkmenistan. As long as new ones were not "propagandizing," then any religion could exist in Turkmenistan.

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¶18. (SBU) Parliament was working on a new media law. The government recognized that civic opinion was very important, and the top leadership paid much attention to how media were working. President Berdimuhamedov traveled a great deal -- "Who hasn't he met with?" she asked -- and always focused on the needs of the people.

¶19. (SBU) In closing, DAS Krol commented that the U.S. Congress was interested in Turkmenistan's development. He suggested that there be more contact between parliamentarians in both countries. Nurberdiyeva agreed. (NOTE: A group of Turkmen deputies will likely visit the United States in March 2009 under the Open World program administered by the Library of Congress. END NOTE.)

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT: Nurberdiyeva was cordial and polite throughout the meeting. Her comments, however, generally steered clear of substance and often reverted to the politically "safer" theme of positive contributions made by President Berdimuhamedov. A visit by congressional representatives would be another opportunity to build bridges to Turkmenistan while it slowly opens up to the new ideas and international practices consistent with President Berdimuhamedov's repeated exhortations. END COMMENT.

¶11. (U) DAS Krol has cleared this cable.

CURRAN